

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20510**

June 16, 2020

Commissioner Suzi LeVine  
Washington Employment Security Department  
212 Maple Park Ave SE  
Olympia, WA 98501

Dear Commissioner LeVine,

We write on behalf of our constituents who need drastically improved service from the Washington State Employment Security Department (ESD).

In March, Congress unanimously approved and the president signed into law the CARES Act to provide much-needed additional unemployment benefits to workers impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Since then, our offices have received requests for assistance from thousands of Washington residents who have gone weeks, and in some cases months, without a response from ESD to a problem they're experiencing in receiving those benefits. As federal representatives, we have no direct role in distributing unemployment benefits, and we estimate that we are only hearing from a fraction of residents encountering these challenges.

Specifically, residents have told us that they have sent requests for assistance through their online SecureAccess Washington (SAW) accounts, but have received no response, follow up, or even confirmation that their message was received. In some cases, residents have told us that they have attempted to call ESD over one thousand times to reach a staff member, but have never succeeded in speaking with a live person.

Washingtonians who do manage to connect with a live person tell us that ESD staff often lacks the training to answer basic questions or resolve their issues. This has led to hours waiting on hold, multiple transfers, and dropped calls.

We also received a flood of complaints from residents when benefits were temporarily stopped while ESD scrambled to address the massive unemployment fraud case that reportedly cost the state over \$600 million. Many of those complaints have come from single mothers, low-income individuals and vulnerable seniors who had their benefits disrupted for weeks on end.

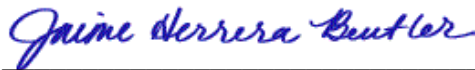
On May 29, you received a letter from a bipartisan group of Washington congressional representatives specifically requesting an action plan from you detailing ESD's efforts to assist citizens who lack access to reliable internet to apply for unemployment benefits. More than two weeks later, we have received no response from you and have seen no additional steps taken by ESD to solve this challenge. We continue to hear from rural residents and seniors who lack the ability to apply online and cannot get through on the phone.

This problem unfortunately seems to be emblematic of ESD's challenges in assisting residents across the board; requests for help continue to pour into our offices from residents of all ages in urban, suburban and rural communities who report that ESD is either unresponsive or too ill-equipped to assist them. Our offices have been told by constituents and local advocates that the adjudication process is taking an average of 8 weeks or more for constituents to receive their benefits. For most families, going 8 weeks without income is catastrophic.

Furthermore, given the volume of disenfranchised individuals who have qualified for but not received unemployment benefits, we found it unbelievable that your office informed congressional offices on a June 8th conference call that we would have to limit the number of "cases for escalation" – i.e., our most needy constituents who had been failed by ESD to that point – to five individuals per Congressional office. That number barely scratches the surface of what is needed.


We urge you to review the entire ESD unemployment benefit operation and implement immediate improvements. Thank you for your attention to this pressing matter and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



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Jaime Herrera Beutler  
Member of Congress



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Cathy McMorris Rodgers  
Member of Congress



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Dan Newhouse  
Member of Congress